

A RESEARCH PROJECT EXPLORING THE FUTURE OF THE
COLLECTIVE CINEMA EXPERIENCE



COLLECTIVE CINEMA EXPERIENCES DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS JULY 2020

RAPHAËLLE CITTANOVA

in collaboration with QUERALT PONS



WWW.KINOPROTOTYPE.COM

SUMMARY

Introduction

This report provides an overview of exhibition initiatives that emerged as a reaction to the closure of cinemas during the COVID-19 crisis. It presents in particular case studies of collective cinema experiences - led by arthouse exhibitors and the wider industry - that took place between March and June 2020 in Europe and Latin America.

Background

Kino Prototype is a research project developed within the frame of NEXT WAVE, a professional training programme of the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (DFFB). The project aims to explore how the current period of experimentation can help re-imagine the collective cinema experience. In its preliminary phase, the research focuses on the industry practices implemented during the closure of cinemas.

A new horizon

- Independent arthouse exhibitors have demonstrated their ability to adapt over the last few months, despite interrupted access to their venue, by developing creative strategies to stay in touch with their audiences and give access to a vast array of films.
- A significant number of virtual cinema initiatives have been developed by independent distributors to release arthouse films on the basis of cinemas' established brands with local audiences.
- Partnership models with platforms dedicated to VOD for cinemas or VOD services operated by cinema networks have expanded, with exhibitors now viewing them as complementary offers rather than competitors.

Key insights

1. Arthouse cinemas' role as trusted curators is expanding as is a better recognition of their expertise in community engagement

Arthouse cinemas are turning into curator "brands", their activities now extending beyond their walls.

2. New modes of access and participatory models are emerging

Both online and through other channels, the discussion can be extended to a much wider audience than before, and the audience is able to participate and co-create the event.

3. The role of online platforms and their relationship with cinemas are being redefined: are we heading towards hybrid strategies ?

Virtual and physical offers seem not only to complement each other, but also to merge gradually.

Case studies

More than 15 professionals were interviewed - among which exhibitors, distributors or institutions - to learn about the process that led to developing alternative collective viewing experiences and the first results observed.

The report includes 10 case studies divided in the following categories of experience:

- **Live stream online screenings**

Lodderbast Kino (Germany), La Vingt-Cinquième Heure (France), Moje Kino Live (Czech Republic), Kino Doma (Slovakia), #lorestoinsala (Italy)

- **Watch parties**

Vitamine Cineville Viewing party (Netherlands), Curzon Living Room (UK)

- **Neighborhood's screenings**

WindowFlicks (Berlin, Germany), #Alltogether (Latin America), Pelis por Bogotá (Colombia)

- **Drive-in**

Aerocinema (Lithuania)

Other companies mentioned

Cineteca Milano (IT), Cinémathèque Française (FR), Arsenal (DE), Curzon (UK), Cineville (NL), La Toile (FR), Kino on Demand (DE), Kinovod (AT), Picl (NL), Mio Cinema (IT), Sala Virtual de Cine (ES), Kino Lorber (US), Europa Cinemas, MUBI (UK), Film Movement (US), Modern Films (UK), Grandfilm (DE), Neon (US), Picture Motion (US), Exposure Labs (US)

A NEW HORIZON

*During this unprecedented period of cinema closures, **independent arthouse cinemas have demonstrated their ability to respond and adapt perhaps more effectively than larger mainstream players**, staying in touch with audiences and **strengthening their role as cultural hubs for their communities**.*

*Indeed, **many initiatives have popped up amongst the independent sector to continue to offer a vast array of films to audiences online**. Some distributors were quick to create virtual offers and work out new ways of collaborating with exhibitors.*

*Meanwhile, **several exhibitors developed their own TVOD offers or partnered up with existing platforms to make films available**. Cinemas have demonstrated their ability to continue to act as trusted curators for their audience with the support of industry partners despite the physical and financial challenges of the crisis.*

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"One of the things we have to remember about these theaters is that they are part of their communities" (...) "These theaters, because they're mission-driven, have a loyalty and a buy-in and an impact in their communities that will be a strength in their struggle to survive."

Peter Becker (President, The Criterion Collection, US) [1]

A time to share collections and support a public in need of cultural activities

From the first weeks of the lockdown, many film libraries and film distributors have offered unprecedented free access to their catalogues.

- The Milan Cinematheque was among the first to give access to 500 movies of its catalog at the beginning of March. In one week, the number of subscribers increased from 300 to 19.000[2].
- In Berlin, the Arsenal - Institute for Film and Video Art - opened to the public its virtual program Arsenal 3. Since mid-March, seven programs have been made available including around 20 films of their collection, thanks to the collaboration of filmmakers that agreed to offer their work during this period.
- In Paris, the French Cinematheque launched Henri, a platform offering one new rare movie of their catalog every night.
- French arthouse production, sales and exhibition group MK2 launched mk2 curiosity, offering each week a selection of movies from their own catalog. By the end of May, the platform had presented 50 films in 10 weeks, reaching 220.000 views.

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In parallel, some exhibitors and partners have launched or further developed TVOD and SVOD offers.

- The UK curated streaming platform Curzon Home Cinema operated by the arthouse cinema chain Curzon - a strong advocate of day and date releases - experienced its biggest weekend to date in early May, following the digital release of the Harvey Weinstein-inspired drama *The Assistant*, directed by Kitty Green[3].
- In the Netherlands, Cineville - a community and membership scheme gathering 46 cinemas - built in two weeks the SVOD platform Vitamine Cineville. Accessible for free to Cineville's members during the closure of cinemas, it was also possible to make a subscription to support the cinemas, with 90% of the revenues going to the exhibitors. The objective was firstly to retain the nearly 50.000 members vital to the network of cinemas. With almost 120 films available during the closure, the platform succeeded to keep the community engaged: it didn't generate any revenue as the content was offered for free to all members in April and May, but the total drop in subscriptions was actually lower than usual for the summer season.

[2] (2020, March 16). La cinémathèque de Milan met son catalogue en accès libre. Le Figaro

[3] Rosser, M. (2020, May 6). The Assistant' helps Curzon Home Cinema record best ever weekend. Screen Daily

Exhibitors without their own catalog have also largely continued to curate films for their audiences through recommendations and partnerships with TVOD and SVOD platforms.

- Indeed, the number of partnerships between exhibitors and TVOD platforms for cinemas in Europe has grown rapidly, allowing cinemas to offer personalized and constantly evolving curation week after week. Some were already existing (among them La Toile in France, Kino On Demand in Germany and Kinovod in Austria). The most successful platform seems to be Picl in the Netherlands which included in its offer in early April almost 90% of independent cinemas in the country[4]. New platforms have also appeared during the closure of cinemas: Mio Cinema was launched in Italy by the distributor Lucky Red, while Sala Virtual de Cine in Spain was created by A Contracorriente Films, one of the largest independent distributors, also a producer and exhibitor.
- The collaboration between the network of cinemas Europa Cinemas - focusing on European films - and the arthouse SVOD platform MUBI gave member cinemas the opportunity to offer 90 days of free subscription to their audiences during the closure period. Already positioned as a partner of cinemas with the launch of MUBI Go in 2018 - a service giving access to one free cinema ticket per week to subscribers - MUBI gained a significant number of subscribers via the participating cinemas. MUBI is thus consolidating its strategy of working closely with cinemas and launched a crowdfunding campaign in the UK to support them during the Covid 19 crisis.

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A proliferation of "virtual cinemas"

- The emergence of the concept of "virtual cinema" introduced by theatrical and home video label Kino Lorber in the United States has quickly been adopted in various forms throughout the arthouse films world.
- Such distributors have acknowledged the crucial role played by cinemas in the release of their films. They were quick to decide that the most cost-effective way to reach their audiences online would be through the existing communities of these cinemas and with their expertise - rather than releasing directly on standard TVOD platforms. Their aim has been to create virtual theatrical releases that both bring a potential new revenue stream for cinemas and optimise their online releases. What is new here for exhibitors is the collaboration with TVOD exclusive releases of distributor-led platforms and a revenue split - sometimes up to 50% - as if they had presented the films in their physical venues.

- Kino Lorber launched the virtual initiative Kino Marquee as soon as cinemas closed, using the infrastructure of its already existing TVOD platform Kino Now. In order to replicate the theatrical model as faithfully as possible, the platform provides customizable individual pages for each cinema to display their current programming among the distributor's releases.
- Following the idea of mirroring the theatrical release pattern, territorial exclusivity and a 60-90 days run have been maintained. As the platform is not geolocalized so far, the audience is invited to select the venue of their choice. Three months after launching the initiative gathered nearly 400 independent and arthouse cinema partners.

"We've had much more engagement from the theaters for virtual screenings than we were ever able to achieve with physical for the simple reason that most of the arthouses in the U.S. are small with probably no more than three or four screens at most, some still have one or two. But suddenly, a world of screen scarcity has become a world of screen plenitude and the theaters have literally unlimited screen space." [5]

Richard Lorber, Kino Lorber

- Other distributors have implemented similar models using the support of different streaming video services, the most common being Vimeo OTT (among them the virtual platform of Film Movement in the US) and setting up a system which, without allocating a specific page to the cinemas, donates part of the revenues to exhibitors (Modern Films in the UK, Grandfilm in Germany...).
- US distributor Neon has expanded the concept to a larger scale with a release strategy involving non-theatrical partners: local businesses such as restaurants, museums or non-profits were offered the opportunity to be partners in their virtual releases and share the revenues, as in the models mentioned previously. The first experiment took place with the release of Matt Wolf's documentary *Spaceship Earth*, the story of a group that decided to self-isolate in the 1990s. By giving local businesses a new way to connect with their communities, Neon has also transformed these non-traditional partners into distributors of a new kind.

- So far, cinemas have responded mostly positively to these strategies to keep their audiences engaged and secure some revenues, no matter how small, during the period of closure. Overall, the concept of “virtual cinema” seems to be based largely on the effectiveness of local venues’ existing brands and marketing, with results dependent on the cinemas’ already established community.
- These types of models may persist once the cinemas are reopening, opening a debate on cross platform release models in the future. At the same time, a key issue has appeared regarding the audiences’ data management: with distributors being the direct interlocutors in the transactions, the rules in establishing this relation are still variable between models and will need to be clarified if the distributors-led “virtual cinema” platforms continue to expand.

Perhaps a major lesson from all these initiatives is the evidence of the role of arthouse cinemas as brands and platforms with the potential to engage their communities in a diverse range of films. They have demonstrated that they can be cultural points of reference beyond their physical location and crucial partners for the industry to activate audiences at the local level.

It’s also fair to say that the closure of cinemas has opened up a space to experiment with new models of film exhibition, broadening notions of what is meant by the collective experiences of cinema going.

CASE STUDIES OF COLLECTIVE CINEMA EXPERIENCES

Which initiatives have attempted to create collective cinema experiences?

- We considered “collective cinema experiences” to be: **models offering the possibility to gather a group of people to watch a film at fixed times and uninterruptedly**
- We looked at models implemented by arthouse exhibitors and the wider industry, **exploring the hypothesis that the models being piloted during this key period of transformation could help inform a shared understanding of post-covid 19 models of exhibition and collective cinema experiences**

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MODELS HIGHLIGHTED



LIVE STREAM
ONLINE SCREENINGS



WATCH PARTIES



NEIGHBORHOODS'
SCREENINGS



DRIVE-IN

LIVE STREAM ONLINE SCREENINGS

*The concept of “virtual cinema” evoked previously creates a challenge for exhibitors: that of **mirroring the out-of-home experience**. To achieve this, some exhibitors have put on **screenings to gather their audiences via a livestream** on existing platforms, or by creating their own platform.*

*In most cases, it is **impossible to pause, rewind or delay the screening of the film and opens up possibilities of interaction with the audience** through integrated chats or post-event discussions.*

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- Lodderbast Kino (Germany)
- La vingt-cinquième heure (France)
- Moje Kino Live (Czech Republic)
- Kino Doma (Slovakia)
- #lorestoinsala (Italy)

Lodderbast Kino online cinema (Hannover, Germany)

(Project lead) Lodderbast Kino.

(Role) Exhibitor. One-screen with 22 seats cinema created in 2018 and called by its owners "the smallest cinema in the world."

(Project duration) Since mid-march 2020.

(Concept) When the lockdown started, the team decided to organize a daily film screening to keep on showing interesting films, and also to be a place to come for people who were isolated.

Wiebke and Johannes Thomsen - the owners - introduce the movie and moderate the live-talk with filmmakers, experts or people from the cultural sector after the screening. The movie is accessible for free with the possibility to make donations to distributors or filmmakers through Paypal. The streams are embedded on the website through Vimeo, and the audience can interact in the chat on the website or by texting.

(Partners) To date, the project is financed by the cinema in cooperation with the distributors.

(Curation) Debut films, "young and wild films" from Germany, genre films and "all sorts of extraordinary or experimental gems".

(Specificity) Strong identity of the duo of owners who embody the venue during intros and talks. Lodderbast Kino is already renowned for its niche curation, so the livestreams allow them to reach a much larger audience.

(Results) In 3 months they reached 50.000 views with screenings between 30 and 2000 spectators.

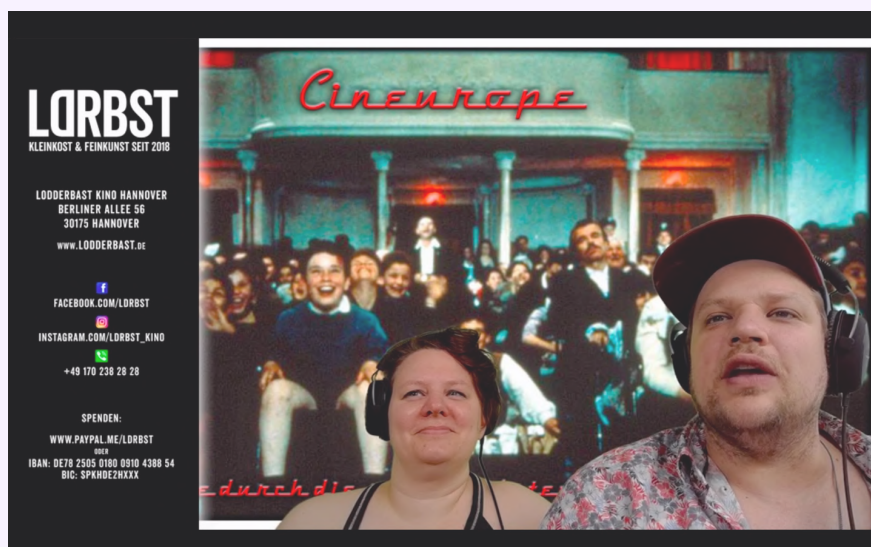
At the beginning of the lockdown they started the online-cinema to keep in touch with their regular audience. But the audience has grown week after week and is now around the whole country. The most successful screenings were *Colour out of Space* (US, 2019) followed by a live-talk with director Richard Standley, and *Hello my name is - German Graffiti* (DE, 2015) followed by a live-talk with director Stefan Pohl and Graffiti Artists.

(Key learnings) "We learned that it is possible to create a kind of "cinema feeling" online, when there is an introduction before and a talk after the movie. The key is (as opposed to a regular on-demand screening) that we all watch the film at the same time and that it is possible for the audience to interact with us and in the talk with guests."

Wiebke Thomsen (Co-owner)

(What happens next) Cinema's owners are confident that this initiative will not keep people from visiting their cinema. They already plan to keep parallel screenings online: the same film will be shown in the cinema and online - with a talk streamed from the cinema or if the guests can't visit the cinema, screened in the cinema via the livestream. People that can't come will still be able to get "a Lodderbast cinematic experience".

(Website) <http://www.lodderbast.de/>



Source: livestream of the event "Cineurope - A virtual trip to Europe's most interesting cinemas"

La Vingt-Cinquième Heure (France)

(Project lead) La Vingt-Cinquième Heure.

(Role) Production and distribution company.

(Project duration) Since mid-march 2020.

(Concept) The geo-localized virtual cinema was launched with the goal to reproduce the theatrical experience attached to a specific location and to address the access barriers to arthouse cinemas. Screenings take place on a custom-made platform at set times, often followed by live Q&As or Masterclasses. The programming is made in collaboration with exhibitors and is renewed every week.

(Partners) The catalog available to exhibitors includes around 100 movies thanks to the collaboration with 50 distributors - among them the most important distributors in France such as StudioCanal and Memento.

(Curation) The programming includes recent and new TVOD releases and is decided by exhibitors and distributors in coordination with the platform.

(Specificity) Emphasis is put on the debate: after the screening, spectators can ask questions through an integrated video chat device. The spectators have only access to the programming of cinemas within 5 to 50km depending on their living area. Each ticket includes a carbon contribution.

(Results) In two months, the platform organized 2.200 screenings with 40.000 spectators[6].

(Key learnings) "As is the case with any event, the success of a screening, which remains confined to a specific geographic area, relies heavily on the effectiveness of a cinema's publicity and its ability to act as intermediary. Depending on a cinema's experience and situation, a screening could attract between 5 and 300 spectators." [7]

Pierre-Emmanuel Le Goff (Founding partner)

(What happens next) From June, the Paris-based cultural institute Forum des images has joined the platform by launching "le FIL", its virtual screen for regular, weekly screenings that will be hosted by the platform.

(Website) <https://www.25eheure.com>



Source: La Vingt-Cinquième Heure website

[6] (2020, June 5). Ces objets de l'ère Covid qui veulent faciliter notre quotidien. Les Echos

[7] Selliez J. (2020, May 7). La Vingt-Cinquième Heure and the Virtual Cinema. Europa Cinemas. Europa Cinemas

Moje Kino Live ("My cinema live", Czech Republic)



(Project lead) Initiated by a network of cinemas in Prague (Aero, Světozor, Přítomnost, Bio Oko, Bio Central).

(Role) Exhibitors.

(Project duration) Since the end of March 2020.

(Concept) When cinemas closed, the team thought about bringing cinema on-line for their audience. Every night, one screening was offered and accessible after buying a ticket on the website of cinemas, for the regular price or with a donation in support of the cinema. Spectators could then access the livestream after receiving a private link on Youtube Live.

(Partners) The cooperation with their close partner and distribution company Aerofilms was decisive: they showed mostly movies from their catalog, and some titles from other distributors such as CinemArt.

(Curation) European and Czech arthouse titles available in pay per view license & special events (lectures, artists shows).

(Specificity) Emphasis was put on recreating the atmosphere of the cinema hall and offer a social experience: the livestream was opening 30 minutes before the movie with music, slides, and also in some events introductions by members of the team of cinemas. The audience had the possibility to interact on the chat during the whole program, with the team chatting and sharing trivia facts about the movie.

(Results) By the end of April, the average attendance was about 270 viewers per screening, with a total of around 15.000 admissions in 2 months. The most popular events were non-film streams (an Esoteric show even gathered 2000 people) and lectures with live Q&A. Most successful movies were: Jiří Havelka's *Owners* (CZ, 2019), Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (KOR, 2019) and Nicolas Bedos' *La Belle Époque* (FR, 2019).

(Key learnings) "We feel like it's a great project and tool that should be preserved and maybe part of the cinema in the future. One of the key elements is that we can reach many individual audience members in the whole territory with content that might not be otherwise easy to find in their local venues for these people."

Ivo Andrlé (CEO of Aerofilms)

(What happens next) The daily screenings were interrupted once cinemas reopened, with the plan to keep the project for special events with high audience potential, like online premieres or lectures. In June, the project was extended - in a new format - to other partners bringing together nearly 30 cinemas with a dedicated webpage. Spectators can decide how much to pay for the event with a set minimum price and support the cinema of their choice. It's also possible for companies to set up a private virtual screening as well as buy advertising slots available during public events.

(Website) <http://www.mojekinolive.cz/>

Kino Doma (Slovakia)

(Project lead) The platform was created by the Slovak Film Institute and the cinema Kino Lumiere (Bratislava), then joined by Kino Usmev (Košice).

(Role) National film institute and exhibitors.

(Project duration) Mid-April until the end of June 2020.

(Concept) The initiative was built to support cinemas and Slovak films during the period of closure. Taking place three times a week, one movie was offered at a fixed time, accessible 20 minutes prior to the screening. The tickets could be bought directly from the local cinemas to support them. A link was then sent with a password to access the screening on Kino Doma's website, with the movie being streamed live through the use of Vimeo.

(Partners) Kino Lumiere has been operating the whole system and providing the technical support of the platform. The price of tickets was the same for all cinemas and set by the distributors.

(Curation) Mainly Slovak and European arthouse titles from 2019 and 2020. Short vintage films or retro advertisements provided by the Slovak Film Institute were also screened before the movie.

(Specificity) To best recreate the atmosphere of the cinema, a background music and playful slides referring to the usual moviegoing experience were displayed. The chat was also a very important part of the community experience, allowing interactions between film staff and participants.

(Results) The average attendance for the participating Kino Usmev was until the end of May between 15 and 30 viewers per night, 150 including the two other participating cinemas. Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* was the most popular screening and the one that created the most interaction between the audience:

"You could really feel the "atmosphere" of cinema as a social experience. That's probably the most important added value of the project, that differentiates it from other virtual platforms providing VOD content."

Nina Šilanová (Project Manager in charge of the project, Kino Usmev)

(Key learnings) "We learned that we need to react quickly, be flexible, adapt, create and cooperate on new projects. It is important to build the brand even if your core business gets stuck and blindsided."

Barbora Tóthová (Project Manager, Kino Usmev)

(What happens next) After the reopening, participating cinemas have decided to focus on bringing the audience back in theatres and are not hosting online screenings at the moment.



Source: Kino Usmev website

#ioresto in SALA (Italy)



(Project lead) Initiated by the Anteo Palazzo del Cinema in Milan, Circuito Cinema Genova, Academy Two, Visionario in Udine, Tucker Film and Cineteca di Bologna.

(Role) Exhibitors and distributors.

(Project duration) Since the end of May 2020.

(Concept) The virtual cinema initiative was built on a national level to ensure cinemas could have an alternative plan during the closure and offer dual programming (physical and online) in the future to their audience, without any intermediary. Exhibitors remain responsible for their programming - differentiating here from the TVOD platform Mio Cinema launched a few weeks earlier. The purchase of tickets and access to the screenings goes directly through the cinemas, with an infrastructure supported by the Italian viewing platform MyMovies. Once the screening starts, the movie can be watched live or up to 36h later. Spectators have the possibility to interact through an integrated chat on the platform or a messaging system activated by the cinema.

(Partners) By the end of June, the initiative included more than 70 cinemas all over Italy and around 15 independent distributors. The project is designed to be inclusive and is open to all cinemas that wish to participate.

Manuelle Sangalli - owner of Cinema Italia in Belluno - sees in the platform the opportunity to show films that are generally difficult to screen in his 300 seats cinema.

(Curation) The selection, made available by distributors on Mymovies, includes first releases or catalogue titles in original language with subtitles or dubbed versions.

Among the first films offered: *Bad Tales* by the D'Innocenzo brothers (IT/CH, 2020), *On a Magical Night* by Christophe Honoré (FR, 2019) or Christoph Waltz's *Georgetown* (US, 2019). Additional content and special programs (reviews, live Q&A, pre-recorded introductions by directors/actors...) are also available on some events, with the possibility for exhibitors to have the videos crossposted directly on their own social media accounts.

(Specificity) Each cinema can be allocated the same number of screens and seats available in the physical venue. There is no custom webpage, which means that exhibitors keep a direct link with their audience and manage themselves their data.

(Results) The first three events that took place - screenings of the movies *Bad Tales*, *Tornare* by Cristina Comencini and the animated film *The Bears' Famous Invasion of Sicily* with live Q&As - reached 300 to 600 online views, with 15.000 to 20.000 views for the talks.

(What happens next) "We firmly believe in the collective nature of the cinematic experience and in the emotional sharing between spectators: this is one of the most precious prerogatives of the movie-theatres, but we have tried to transfer the same spirit into our virtual screenings. Moreover, considering the Italian film market, it's easy for a film not to be in theatres long enough to be seen by all interested viewers, so #iorestoinsala could be a precious second chance for them".

Sergio Oliva (Head of Programming, Anteo Palazzo del Cinema)

WATCH PARTIES

*An expansion of free plug-ins, apps and online streaming services has allowed spectators to organise their own watchalong and opened **new possibilities to experience collective viewing experiences.***

*Through the use of chat with sometimes a camera and mic these initiatives **allow people to organize private** (Netflix Party, TwoSeven) **and also public watch-parties** (Twitch, Kast). Some of them are compatible with Netflix, HBO, Youtube or Vimeo. Others have also developed official partnerships such as Twitch, which allows "creators" users to host live streams of content from Amazon Prime's catalogue of movies and TV.*

Exhibitors running their own TVOD platform, exhibitor's partners or even filmmakers and producers have been also organizing watchalongs followed by talks to keep the communal experience of watching movies alive.

*With such a huge mass of online events and competition, **one-off events can strategically help to differentiate:** they gather viewers together with the option of a livestream of the film on their own platform or via a partner, and **usually include a post-event discussion at a set time**, often accessible to all via social networks. These initiatives create routines and invite the audiences to engage on social media.*



- Vitamine Cineville Viewing Party (Netherlands)
- Curzon Living Room (UK)

Vitamine Cineville Viewing Party (Netherlands)

(Project lead) Cineville.

(Role) Network that connects 46 cinemas in the Netherlands through a monthly subscription.

(Project duration) From the end of March 2020 until now.

(Concept) Along with the launch of the SVOD platform Vitamine Cineville (mentioned p.5 of this report), Cineville's team decided to organize watchalongs and Q&As with directors or actors to keep the community feeling alive among their members during the closure of cinemas. Access to the films was opened to pre-existing or newly registered Cineville members. Introductions from programmers working at Cineville's cinemas as well as post-event discussions, were accessible live via Youtube or Facebook, giving the audience the possibility to interact in the chat.

(Partners) Distributors, festivals and cinemas part of the network.

(Curation) Talent and community events associated with titles curated for Vitamine Cineville's platform. Among them: *Bait* with director Mark Jenkin (UK, 2019) or the feminist thriller *Swallow* with director Carlo Mirabella-Davis, a Premiere organized in partnership with Imagine Film Festival that was cancelled because of the lockdown.

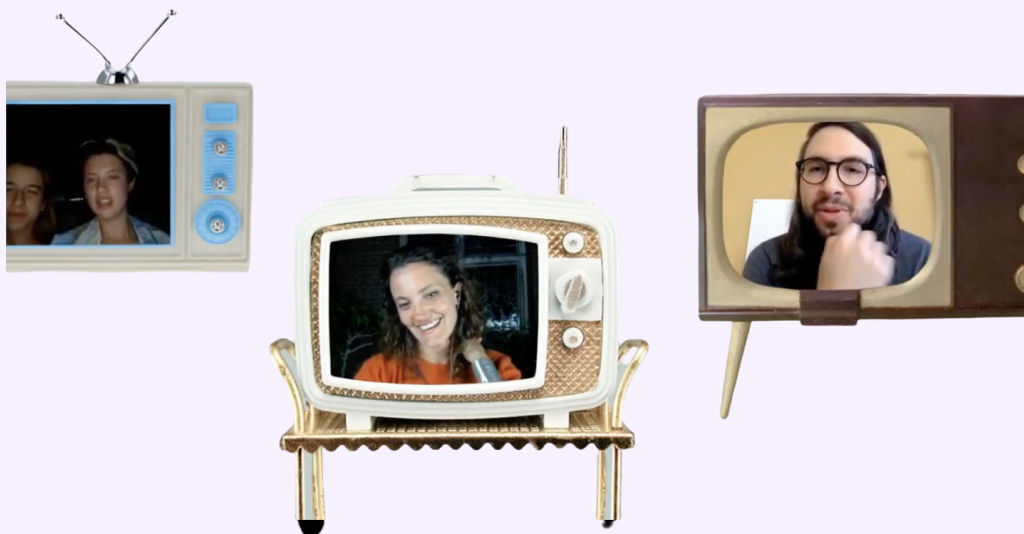
(Specificity) A particular set up for intros and Q&As with participants appearing on retro TVs was created for this occasion. This allowed the audience to take part in the discussion and appear together with the guest and moderator through a Skype call. The team also created a quiz with emoji or quarantine quotes from movies to encourage the audience to interact in the chat.

(Results) Until the end of May, six events took place (4 watch parties, 2 premieres). The average attendance was between 100 and 150 active viewers live on Facebook and Youtube, and between 1000 and 4000 views with catch-up included.

(Key learnings) "Vitamine Cineville is another testimony to how much the film community in The Netherlands is willing to cooperate".
"Vitamine Cineville became a bigger project than expected, because it also involves programming!"

Lauren Murphy (Head of content)

(What happens next) Once the cinemas reopened, Cineville decided to organize an online film quiz, instead of watch-parties, not to compete with the cinemas part of the network. The first quiz reached more than 600 views.



Vitamine Cineville Première Party - *Swallow*, with Carlo Mirabella-Davis, Lauren Murphy and audience members

Curzon Living Room Q&As (UK)

(Project lead) Curzon.

(Role) Exhibitor, distributor, TVOD and SVOD platform.

(Project duration) From the end of March 2020.

(Concept) Curzon Living Room was created to offer continuity during the closure of cinemas with the in-cinema Q&A programme of Curzon, and use events to support its streaming service Curzon Home Cinema (CHC). Around two times a week, Q&As take place online on Zoom with directors, actors and other panelists. All events are available for free. The film discussed during the event is available on release a few days earlier on CHC and the team provides a suggested start time for collective watching (at 6pm, with Q&A at 8.30pm). Talks are streamed live on CHC, Youtube, Facebook and Twitter, offering the chance for audiences to interact during the event. Videos are then accessible on the platform and used as publicity for the film's VOD release and for CHC.

(Partners) UK film distributors have been essential partners, especially the publicity and sales teams (among them Modern Films, BFI, Lionsgate, Dogwoof and Curzon Artificial Eye).

(Curation) Talent events to support new PVOD and TVOD releases. All events support films that have an engagement on CHC and fit the existing brand values of the streaming service: arthouse, foreign language, documentaries and quality mainstream films. Some Q&As are also associated with titles from Curzon's catalogue.

(Specificity) In addition to the Curzon Living Room events, a number of films have been supported on CHC in partnership with the Human Rights Watch Film Festival and Edinburgh International Film Festival, with Q&As arranged for some or all of their titles.

(Results) Since march, over 30 Q&As were held under the Curzon Living Room brand, reaching a total of approx. 200.000 views. On average, events gathered around 1000 viewers live, and 5000 with catch up included. The most popular events were *Military Wives* with actress Kristin Scott Thomas (10.000 views on all platforms), *Diego Maradona* with director Asif Kapadia (6.600 views on Twitter) and *Bait* with director Mark Jenkin.

(Key learnings) "We are learning more as each event goes by, however, as the social restrictions are relaxed and cinemas reopen, it's almost impossible to predict whether what I know and put into use today will still be relevant in a month's time."

Michael Garrad (Events programmer)

(What happens next) Before the closures, some live Q&A events were already held simultaneously in cinemas and on CHC. The Living Room Q&As will go on as they have the advantage of bringing live content and subscriptions to both CHC and venues.

"The cinema Q&A programme online is a key part of our offering and a big draw for members and regular customers. Many films we have Q&As for have their own niche appeal which enables us to reach new audiences." M.G

(Website) www.live.curzonhomecinema.com



Parallel to these initiatives, some impact agencies and production companies gave people the opportunity to organize their own community screenings of topic-driven films followed by discussions. Reminiscent of the concept of cine-clubs, these initiatives aim to inspire and encourage people to take action.

In the United States, the social impact agency for film and entertainment Picture Motion managed the virtual screening tour of five titles, including the documentary about the plastic pollution crisis *Story of Plastic* directed by Deia Schlosberg. Through the website of the movie, the possibility is given to anyone to host a screening - with a comprehensive guide on how to do it provided - or join a screening at a set date and time. After the screening, guests are invited to participate in a discussion and fill a survey provided by Picture Motion to measure the impact on the community.

"Our team worked quickly when COVID-19 hit to shift all of our screening tours online. We created our own screening room which we are now using for some of our projects, and adapted other screening tours using existing platforms. We learned that there is no one size fits all solution for all of our campaigns. It has been our job to come up with a menu of available options that we, along with our clients, can choose from when designing a virtual screening tour & impact campaign."

Lillie Flescher, Picture Motion

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The American production and impact film production company Exposure Labs organized on the 50th anniversary of Earth Day the Earth Day Watch Party. A film library was made available to screen - with features related to the themes of justice and climate change - and provided the participants with a watch-party guide to help groups organize themselves with their base. Homemade reaction cards were used by the audience throughout the film to share their feelings. A key point for the activist groups is that the set up of screenings creates an email list with people to follow up actions, and especially the possibility to follow up immediately after the screening. "Embracing a spirit of experimentation, we see it as a testing ground of sorts for identifying best practices and new models for using film to convene virtually". The screenings took place in 30 countries with 280 registered watch parties[8].

NEIGHBORHOODS' SCREENINGS

*Although virtual initiatives have been predominant during the closure of cinemas, some collective screenings have nonetheless been organized outdoors. **Various pop-up initiatives have taken place, bringing screens to neighborhoods.***

***Following the progress of the lockdown, such initiatives spread quickly all over the world.** In the areas where the pandemic is still keeping the population under a strict lockdown, local initiatives have appeared especially in residential areas where people have no internet access.*

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- WindowFlicks (Berlin, Germany)
- #TodosJuntos (Latin America)
- Pelis por Bogotá (Colombia)

WindowFlicks (Berlin, Germany)



(Project lead) MetaGrey GmbH.

(Role) Volunteer project led by an architecture agency.

(Project duration) From the end of March until the end of June 2020.

(Concept) As the lockdown started, the architect Olaf Karkhoff decided spontaneously with the support of other volunteers to bring films into courtyards every Thursday and Saturday. The aim was to help people by giving them a sense of community through a communal experience, and support cinemas by drawing attention to a crowdfunding campaign (Fortsetzung Folgt).

Neighbors living in buildings with a minimum of twenty apartments and a clear view of a wall were offered the possibility to request a screening and become co-organisers. The company was then bringing the technical equipment needed and free popcorn distributed to residents by a local business before the movie.

(Partners) The public radio Radio Eins supported the initiative with the press and the arthouse exhibition network Yorck helped with the rights for the films. The participating distributors (X Filme, X-Verleih, Studiocanal, DCM...) offered their films for free.

(Curation) A catalog of seven films has been made available by distributors. Among the films: the cult *Goodbye Lenin* directed by Wolfgang Becker, Michel Hazanavicius's *The Artist*, as well as Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* introduced by himself for the first screening.

(Website) www.windowflicks.de

(Specificity) People requesting a screening in their building had the possibility to choose among the list of films on Windowflicks's website. The fact that they had to choose a film together led to unprecedented encounters between neighbors that never talked before and pushed some of them to think of future common plans.

(Results) In three months, nearly 30 screenings took place. This model didn't create any revenue for the organisers or distributors of the films but it contributed to raise awareness of the problems faced by the arthouse cinema scene in Berlin. Its support to the *Fortsetzung Folgt* campaign was instrumental in raising 163.127€.

(Key learnings) "What you need to change things - that's what I have learned - is bottom-up: you need the people in the houses to do that. This could be a very democratic way of bringing the culture to the people."

Olaf Karkhoff (Creator)

(What happens next) The last screening took place on the emblematic public square of Alexanderplatz to support homeless people and "make the invisible visible". In consultation with the partners, the initiative is put in stand-by for now so that exhibitors can focus on the reopening of cinemas and the open-air season.



Screening of "Wings of Desire" (© Window Flicks, Alex Klug)

#TodosJuntos #AllTogether Ecocinema (Latin America)

(Project lead) Ecocinema.

(Role) International traveling film platform powered by solar energy with seven participating countries: Uruguay, Argentina, Brasil, Panama, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Colombia.

(Project duration) From April 2020.

(Concept) The concept "All together" was born out of the need to adapt to change after the pandemic suspended Ecocinema's touring and screening activities. Ecocinema is a project born in 2012 with the aim to work towards the democratization of access to cinema in Latin America and to promote environmental protection by transforming public spaces into self-sustainable open-air cinemas. Once the lockdown started, the project was reorganized to reach communities living in apartment complexes. For this purpose, an inflatable screen is installed in front of buildings and is ready in only 15 minutes, thanks to solar energy. Audio is transmitted by FM radio signal so that families can enjoy a movie inside their home.

(Partners) Sponsors, international organizations, local partners (The Climate Reality Project Latin America), local institutions (Canacine - National Chamber of the Film Industry in Mexico), press and local distributors (In Mexico: PIANO, Alphaville Cinema, Pimienta Films).

(Curation) The initiative kicked off with a screening of the Mexican documentary *All of Me / Llévate mis amores* by Arturo González Villaseñor. The movies screened range from short films for children to features accessible by a diverse audience. Movies in original language with subtitles being harder to programme, most of the titles screened are in Spanish or dubbed in Spanish.

(Specificity) The project not only accompanies the population during the health emergency and invites them to stay home, but also reaches a population that does not necessarily have internet access or devices to watch content from streaming platforms. Communication is done through posters at the entrance of the buildings and the intermediary of the building managers so that, thanks to their own communication systems such as the WhatsApp group, people are aware of the events. The aim goes also beyond the projection of films. Together with the United Nations Development Programme and the UN Women agency, they have undertaken to use the film as a tool to raise awareness of ways to denounce domestic violence, which increased during the pandemic.

(Results) In three months, 30 screenings have been organised in Mexico and Uruguay with an average of 300-400 viewers per screening, #AllTogether had by the end of June around 10.000 spectators in total. Most popular screenings were Andoni Canela's documentary *Looking for the Wild* (2016, ES) and *Capitanes de América*, an original production by Ecocinema that portrays the life of the continent's football legends.

(Key learnings) "We must be able to adapt to change, to seek the best way to generate the common good. There is an invisible and neglected audience, either geographically or economically, in terms of cultural rights. Governments had an opportunity in this pandemic to bring cultural offers to these audiences but opted for the simplistic approach of offering online services, believing that all Latin Americans have access to internet."

Gonzalo Lamela (Director)

(What happens next) Ecocinema will continue to hold screenings as long as the lockdown is strict in their areas of operation.

(Website) www.ecocinema.net
www.instagram.com/ecocinemasolar

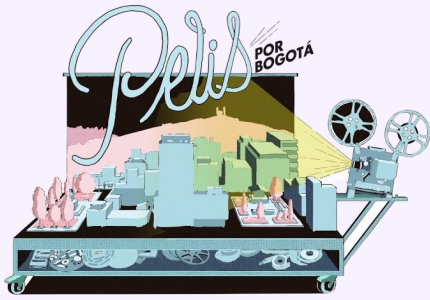


Screening in Montevideo, Uruguay (© Ecocinema, Mario Camino)



© Ecocinema, Pilar Campos

Pelis por Bogotá (Colombia)



(Project lead) Cinematheque of Bogotá - Idartes.

(Role) Cultural center.

(Project duration) From May 2020.

(Concept) Pelis por Bogotá was born in 2017 as an itinerant cinema in the city organized by the Cinematheque of Bogotá. The aim of the project is to promote citizens' access to audiovisual arts through artistic experiences in public places. It seeks to generate a space for reflection and appropriation through film and artistic practices. With the lockdown, a special edition was organized so that the public could enjoy the cinema from home.

(Partners) The natural partners of the Cinematheque are the local town halls which take part in the management of the space and in the diffusion of the event with the community. National short films and feature producers are crucial allies for programming.

(Curation) For the first screening that took place in the district of Suba, the Colombian animated film *El libro de Lila* (directed by Marcela Rincón) was presented. It was introduced by the animated short film *Wayra / viento*, produced by indigenous people from the city of Bogotá during a workshop of the Cinematheca Rodante project - a workshop organized by the Cinematheque to create films collectively.

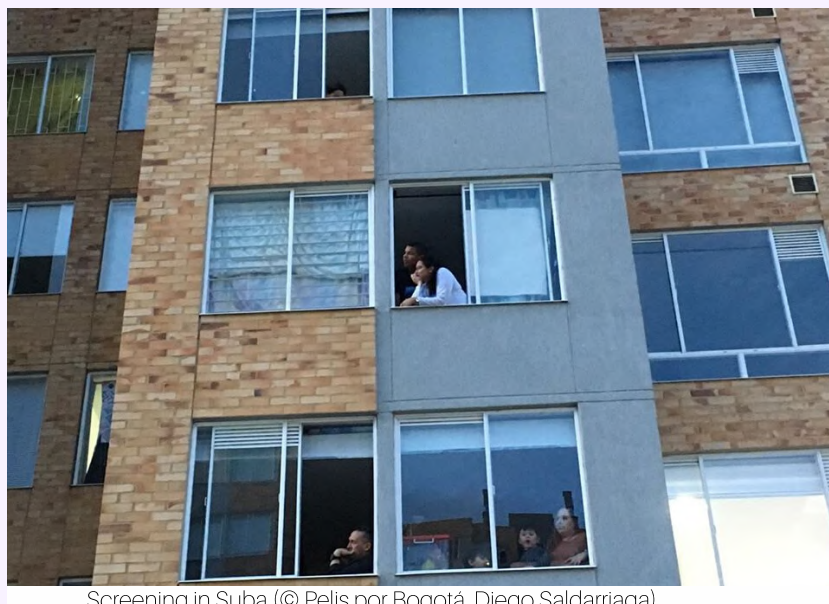
(Specificity) In addition to ensuring protective measures so that the public can enjoy a screening without any risk of contagion, the initiative aims to promote the circulation of local content.

(Results) The screening organised in one of the residential areas in Suba gathered around 100 people who watched the movie from their balconies and windows.

(Key learnings) "It is important to extend our actions not only to virtual offers but also to other media that can bring the public closer to the audiovisual arts. Television or radio are good ways to reach the population of the city that do not have the economic means to have a continuous internet connection at home."

Diego Saldarriaga (Territorial advisor)

(What happens next) The Cinematheque is planning to organize more screenings as long as the population is strictly confined in Colombia. In parallel, a TVOD service (Cinematheca Sala Virtual) was created in order to make Colombian films accessible online during the closure.



Screening in Suba (© Pelis por Bogotá, Diego Saldarriaga)

DRIVE-IN

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*Drive-in cinemas have re-emerged all over the world, evoking **nostalgia** for older generations or appealing to new generations looking for **together-alone experiences**.*

*Often presented as a solution to the crisis for exhibitors, **such initiatives nevertheless focus mostly on mainstream films and imply strong logistical challenges** for structures that have no experience in this domain.*



- Aerocinema (Lithuania)

Aerocinema (Lithuania)

AERO CINEMA

(Project lead) Vilnius Film Festival / Kino Pavasaris Distribution.

(Role) Events organizer, Festival, Distributor.

(Project duration) 30. April - 31. May 2020.

(Concept) Announced after the closing of the Vilnius Film Festival (VFF) - one of the first film festivals that moved online in the world - the drive-in was created by VFF once they had to cancel their usual summer event. The project was conceived with the idea to allow spectators to gather while keeping distance, and to offer both a cinema-going and travel experience. Screenings took place on a runway at Vilnius airport that could welcome up to 220 cars, with tickets only available online.

(Partners) Vilnius Film Festival / Kino Pavasaris is a strong brand in Lithuania that has always worked to promote arthouse cinema. For this reason, the initiative was well received by cinemas in the country, hoping to keep the link with moviegoers alive. Owning the rights of around 120 films as Kino Pavasaris distribution has been crucial to organise the screenings. Of course, this would not have been possible without the collaboration of the airport team who made the project feasible despite the usual regulations.

(Curation) Arthouse titles from Kino Pavasaris' catalog, mostly in original language with subtitles, except for family movies. The black and white version of Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (KOR, 2019) was presented for the opening for the first time in Lithuania and the closing movie was *B-Movie : Lust & Sound* in Westberlin (DE, 2015). To get people into the mood of the films, some dj sets were associated with special events, the dj standing on the embarkation stairway.

(Specificity) The festival team decided not only to do a drive-in but to find a unique location: after scouting more than 20 locations, they chose the Vilnius Airport's runway with the idea to make spectators feel like traveling around the world with movies. To let people get in, they had to get permission from governments to temporarily suspend the control at borders and change the usual regulation requiring a special driving license.

(Results) The one-month programme has included 84 screenings of 58 films that attracted 17.800 spectators. The top screenings included *Parasite*, Jan Komasa's Oscar-nominated *Corpus Christi* (PL, 2019) and Quentin Dupieux's black comedy *Deerskin* (FR, 2019).

(Key learnings) "Having a drive-in is the same as to have an arthouse cinema (...), you always have to make some kind of event: Q&As, live music, DJ-set or special introductions to the films. We have a very good programming department (...) that can present the films and give an extra value to what people are going to see."

Algirdas Ramaska (CEO)

(What happens next) The goal with this initiative was not to create a business model out of it or maintain the event longer than one month. The organisers are in constant search of renewal and are trying to organize an on-site edition of the festival in September.

(Website) <https://kinopavasaris.lt/en/about-aerocinema>



Screening of "Parasite" © Vilnius Airport



© Vilnius Airport

MOVING INTO A FUTURE OF DIVERSE COLLECTIVE CINEMA EXPERIENCES

*The initiatives highlighted in case studies in this report are for now **responses to the crisis** and haven't in most cases developed as sustainable business models. The aim was on the whole to stay in touch with audiences by **offering a short term alternative during closure**.*

*Some of the interviewees however have indicated that they **may develop these alternative offers in the future**, in order to strengthen the reach gained during this period and meet audiences' demands for flexibility.*

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"Any cinema that only has one screen to depend on has to be prepared to duck and dive and grab opportunities. I think the most vulnerable are either end of the spectrum – the huge multiplexes and the smaller independents. (...) The art of survival has to be based on the celebration of the shared experience." [9]

Susannah Shaw (CEO, Curzon Community Cinema, Clevedon, UK)

ARTHOUSE CINEMAS' ROLE AS TRUSTED CURATORS IS EXPANDING AS IS A BETTER RECOGNITION OF THEIR EXPERTISE IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Arthouse cinemas are expanding their role as cultural hubs in their communities. **They are quick to respond to societal issues.** By offering cross-cultural experiences and bringing debate to the forefront, they open up a space for conversations about wider social and political issues through film.

Experimentations of these last months showed again how much **arthouse cinemas are well placed to bring together local audiences** and create collective experiences around films: they have a good sense of who their core audiences are and established ways of communicating with them. For these reasons, **they are crucial players in the arthouse film value chain.**

NEW MODES OF ACCESS AND PARTICIPATORY MODELS

Audience members who may not have been able to access in-venue screenings in the past have the **opportunity to attend and be more active online or on alternative channels**, which opens up the discussion to a much larger audience than previously.

At the same time, **new opportunities are offered to the audience to organize screenings themselves and bring their community together.** Whether they're getting involved in the delivery of events or in creating their own screening, spectators are empowered to become co-creators.

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A REDEFINITION OF THE ROLE OF ONLINE PLATFORMS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH CINEMAS: ARE WE HEADING TOWARDS HYBRID STRATEGIES ?

There is now a possibility to expand the programming and discussion online. **Virtual and physical offers seem not only to complement each other, but also to merge gradually.** Venues with one or only a few screens can take more risks in extending their programming and organize discussions that could have never taken place physically. **Local venues can reach audiences all over a country and appeal to niche audiences simultaneously.**

We can imagine the rise of custom-made platforms allowing cinemas to **keep a direct link with their audience and limit the capture of consumer data by intermediaries.** Developing such alternatives should also enable exhibitors to **create a virtual experience with a user interface that clearly differentiates them from TVOD** and matches their identity.

Key questions are: **How will different segments of the audience react to these hybrid offers? And who will go on to lead the virtual dimension of screenings?**

RESOURCES

Recommendations for cinemas

CICAE

The national arthouse cinemas associations has been gathering in these last months useful information and best practices for all the cinemas facing a temporary closure.
<http://cicae.org/>

EUROPA CINEMAS

The network of cinemas focusing on European films published a series of interviews of exhibitors, distributors and platforms partnering with cinemas during the period of closure.
<https://www.europa-cinemas.org/>

Webinars

Together Films

The UK marketing and distribution company held a series of weekly webinars on digital distribution offerings and audience engagement opportunities during the crisis.
<https://togetherfilms.org/digital-resources>

Articles

Jess Carlin: "Cinemas Partner With VoD Platforms for Virtual Cinema Screenings", [Celluloid Junkie](#), April 2, 2020

Ann Hornaday: "With the theatrical movie business in peril, art houses might hold the key to survival", [Washington Post](#), April 23, 2020

Vadim Rizov: "Are Virtual Theaters Here to Stay?", [Filmmaker Magazine](#), May 18, 2020

Leonardo Goi: "The Current Debate: What Is a Virtual Cinema?", [MUBI Notebook Column](#), May 28, 2020

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Raphaëlle Cittanova and Queralt Pons participated in the NEXT WAVE programme 2019-2020.

Raphaëlle Cittanova holds a Master's degree in Economics and Management of Cultural Products from Sorbonne University (Paris). She has worked for several years as a Production Manager in arthouse production companies in France (Elzévir & Cie, Les Films du Poisson) and as a freelance Associate Producer for TV in Germany. Working on projects ranging from documentaries and features to new media, she developed a strong interest in the multiple possibilities of connections between films and audiences.

Queralt Pons holds a degree in Film and Media Studies from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona). She has worked at Catalan Films & TV, the promotion film agency from Catalonia, where she was Head of Shortcat, the international short film promotion scheme and consultant on international festivals and markets strategies. Currently, she is developing her own international consultancy and part of the international collaborative agency **MORETHAN**.

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WWW.KINOPROTOTYPE.COM

ALL ENQUIRES:

CONTACT@KINOPROTOTYPE.COM

